

Spring 2011

Rose...a Retold Fairy Tale

Anna Mayer

University of Colorado at Boulder

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Anna Mayer

BFA Dance - Studio Concert

April 4, 2011

Rose... a Retold Fairy Tale

"When a fairy tale 'works,' it works itself into our bloodstream and never leaves." - Jack Zipes

(*Brothers & Beasts* 184-5)

Preface

Rose, a modern dance piece, is a retold fairy tale created for my Bachelor of Fine Arts senior concert. During the nine-month process, I conceived, designed, and directed the piece in preparation for our final performance (Irey Theatre, March 11-13, 2011). A digital video recording of the performance is available in the University of Colorado archives. This paper is an exploration of my intentions and influences during the process, as well as a retrospective analysis of the piece's unforeseen impact.

Archetype and Queer Feminism

The dance piece, *Rose*, came to my mind nearly fully-formed – though hazy and fragmented - in the way that the remnants of a dream resurface after waking. I already had the information, the fairy tales; they had worked themselves into my bloodstream and never left, from my childhood viewing of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* to my readings (and re-readings) of contemporary retellings such as Francesca Lia Block's *Rose and the Beast*. I already knew the char-

acters, deep down - they were inside me, in the way that archetypes reside within us across centuries. My job was to cultivate the most potent stories, to foster the characters (both within the performers and myself), and to shape the hazy fragments of my imagination into a story worth telling.

Throughout the creation process, *Rose* seemed to me an exploration of character archetype, balance between light and dark, and the intersection of desire, control, love, and imprisonment. These facets formed the foundation and the root system of *Rose*, from which the piece itself grew. However, as von Franz explains, fairy tales “are like the dreams of those who write down their dreams but never think about them” (145) - on the surface, they seem to be one thing, but upon further thought, they telescopically deepen, providing a rabbit-hole into our unconscious minds. From my archetypal investigations, *Rose* flowered into a form I had not anticipated, though its germination began long before my awareness of its presence.

Rose became a queer revision of classic fairy tales as it transfigured heteronormative tales such as Beauty and the Beast, reforming them to reflect my socio-cultural background as a queer woman. Both the archetypal root system and the subversive flower figure form my understanding of the piece. Through my exploration of fairy tale’s adaptability, especially through archetypal character and theme, the fairy tales re-presented themselves (as fairy tales do) to reflect the storyteller.

To me, the hearts of both queer and feminist theory are the same: that people are people and should be treated as such, regardless of sex, gender, orientation, or presentation. In this way, my understanding of queer feminist theory bears striking resemblance to my understanding of archetypal pursuits. In archetype, the universal encompasses the individual, and the individual reflects a facet of the universal. The Damsel archetype can apply to middle-aged men just as

aply as it can apply to young girls - archetypes are found in all of us, in all people, as we are simply varied forms of the universal. Simply put, the intersection between queer feminism and archetypal theory is this: We are all just people, who all reflect the same universal patterns in our individual lives - a commonality that extends beyond boundaries of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Rose reflects the intersection of my identity as a queer feminist and my interest in surrealism, archetypal psychology, and integrated spirituality. As I played with fairy tale “motifs, characters, and themes,” I found my “own way through the dense woods,” and created new layers of meaning, relevant to my particular viewpoint (*Brothers and Beasts* 185). This is exactly what archetypes do - provide a universal container for our most personal experience.

Storytelling

Before I tell the story, I will explain why I chose to tell a story at all. Most simply, the narrative form is very important to me. It's in my blood, a part of my creative DNA (Tharp). I was raised on novels and movies since before I could even read to myself. I checked out all the youth fiction I could, maxing out the library limit every time, and devouring stacks in an afternoon. Movies were my babysitter, my mother has since told me, as they kept me completely enthralled (and well-behaved) for hours on end. Looking back, I think it was the dramatic plot structure and compelling character development that interested me, and brought me to the edge of my seat. I am not alone in this love for narrative; the billions of dollars spent in Hollywood ticket sales and bestseller novels attest to its power.

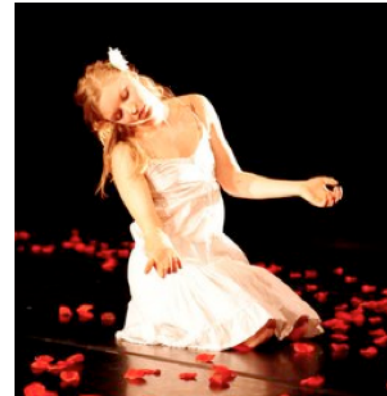
Narrative has a way of letting us live vicariously, as we simultaneously understand the situation and identify with it; effectively, we experience it alongside the characters. This can be seen in the way many of us get a little teary when two lovers dramatically reunite, or in the way some of us yell at the screen (or page) when we see a character making a big mistake. We feel for them because they reflect a part of ourselves. Narrative's ability to inspire empathy is, in my eyes, its greatest power.

While narrative is a powerful tool, it can take several forms, including linear and non-linear (or abstract) narrative. Media such as fiction writing, film, and theater are particularly suited to linear narrative, while other media, such as poetry, are better suited to abstract narrative. Dance is a medium that is suited to both abstract and linear narrative. For my own process, I began with a linear structure, and then moved towards abstraction. Through the abstraction of a linear narrative, I aimed to create a surreal piece with multiple unique interpretations, which meanwhile retained narrative's power.

While it would have been possible to pen an abstract, surreal narrative (many writers have already done so), I chose to present *Rose* as a dance piece. Dance, as a medium, has several distinct advantages suited to my aims: its strong visual impact, its ability to inspire kinesthetic empathy, and its multiplicity of interpretation. Visual art is a large part of my artistic background, so I knew I could supplement the narrative's impact with a strong visual statement, which would not be possible in a written form. More importantly, dance inspires a unique type of empathy, in which a dancer's physical energy translates to the viewer as a visceral experience. John Martin refers to this as 'metakinesis', while Deidre Sklar calls it 'empathetic kinesthetic perception'. Sklar describes this phenomenon as "a combination of mimesis and empathy" (30-1). She explains:

Paradoxically, it implies that one has to close one's eyes to look at movement, ignoring its visual effects and concentrating instead on feeling oneself to be in the other's body, moving... This kind of 'connected knowing' produces a very intimate kind of knowledge, a taste of those ineffable movement experiences that can't be easily put into words." (32)

The ability to internally experience another's movement can also be explained by the action of mirror neurons, which allow us to imitate, understand, and empathize with the actions (and underlying emotions) of other humans (Iacoboni). This, in supplement to narrative's pre-existing empathetic power, allows viewers to connect with the tale in a deeper way than possible through words alone. Lastly, dance (especially in abstract form) lets viewers create a more varied range of interpretations than a written narrative. For example, the sight of a kneeling girl with her wrists and neck bared¹ allows for a wider range of understandings than a storybook that reads, 'and as her only sister disappeared into the woods, the girl felt lost and alone.' Both archetype and fairy tale thrive on individual interpretation and understanding, so dance's subjectivity made the form a logical choice for my purposes.



Choreographically, I place myself within the modern surrealist influence of such dance artists as Maresa Von Stockert and Pina Bausch; especially their characteristic montages pieced together by dream-logic and raw human emotion. Stockert was influential as a contemporary modern dance artist, especially through my viewing of her own twisted fairy tale, *Grim[m] Desires*. Stockert re-envisioned classic Grimm tales in a dark, surreal way, and showed me the rich

¹ All performance photography credit goes to Heather Gray Photography LLC and University of Colorado Public Relations.

possibilities within our shared narrative form. Bausch's work in Tanztheater, with roots in German Expressionism, makes frequent use of abstract narrative, symbolic props, and real human emotion. Her movement vocabularies show that Bausch was less interested in how people move, and what it looks like, than what internal states move people. Likewise, my own movement invention came largely from the improvisation on the internal motivations and emotional states of each character, rather than concern with the visual impact of the movement.

Fairy Tales

Of the many types of narrative available, I was compelled to create a fairy tale. Fairy tales are an incarnation of narrative that have proved long-lasting and effective across cultures and centuries. The Cinderella story, for instance, has been retold countless times, from an ancient Chinese tale, Yeh-Shen (~850 CE), to contemporary United States versions such as the well-known Disney *Cinderella*. One of fairy tale's strengths, as a genre, is its ability to apply to many different people on various levels. For a seven-year-old girl, the Cinderella story may address her parents' unfair treatment of her, and speak to her desire for a more beautiful life, which she surely deserves. For an adult, the same tale may address issues of inner beauty and appearance, as Cinderella's loveliness (and her tiny feet) are apparent, whether she wears a gown or rags. In general, "Fairy tales, like dreams, are deceptively simple. The surface story covers layers of meaning available to astute tellers and listeners." This, Kay Stone argues, "is what has kept the folktale alive... its differing layers of meaning make it relevant to listeners of any age and any level of understanding" (33).

Fairy tales' relevance is apparent to me both by my own fascination and by the sheer volume of contemporary tales. Retold fairy tales have been my favorite genre since, at five years old, I read *The Stinky Cheese Man* (a parody of the classic folk tale, The Gingerbread Man). Since then, contemporary books such as *Ella Enchanted* and *Just Ella* (retold Cinderella stories), as well as *Rose and the Beast* and *Kissing the Witch* (anthologies of short-story retellings) have captured my imagination. These titles are just a small sampling of the many contemporary fairy tales, a remarkable genre in its versatility and endless capacity for reinvention. Jack Zipes reflects on this phenomenon:

[Fairy tales] latch onto us, and we latch onto them; we absorb them, store them, and retell them because they concern our basic instincts and provide hope that we can adapt to a world that is absurd and out of our control...The fairy tale, its very core, wants us to play with its...motifs, characters, and themes to find our own way through the dense woods. It cannot thrive without innovation, just as we cannot thrive without innovation. (*Brothers & Beasts* 185)

Fairy tales are transmitted across cultures and time periods through storytellers' innovation. As they are transmitted, they adapt to the needs of socio-cultural climate, and therefore reflect societal attitudes.

Societal attitudes shape fairy tales, but fairy tales are also designed to shape society. They function as a means of cultural control, perpetuating social and moral norms by presenting them to children (and adults) in story's compelling form. Zipes explains, "...educated writers purposely appropriated the oral folk tale and converted it into a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that children would become civilized according to the social code

of that time” (*Subversion* 3). Often, tales attempt to enforce norms around sexuality, reproduction, and marriage; in short, they attempt to control desire.

Themes of desire and control surface throughout *Rose*, reflecting both the dual symbolism of the rose as well as fairy tales’ function as a societal control mechanism. As a cultural tool, fairy tales reinforce norms such as chastity (Sleeping Beauty and Snow White were both ‘woken’ by their first kiss), heterosexual marriage (heroines almost always marry the prince), and hierarchical lineage (fairy tale characters never marry beneath their class, unless the woman is exceptionally beautiful). The Brothers Grimm had a large role in this sanitization, as they “eliminated erotic and sexual elements that might be offensive to middle-class morality... [and] emphasized specific role models for male and female protagonists according to the dominant patriarchal code of that time” (*The Brothers Grimm* 46). These sanitized patriarchal control mechanisms are part of the tales’ function, and are in many ways problematic; but they are also an exceptional launching point for subversive contemporary retellings.

Subversion and ‘Queering’

Many contemporary retellings challenge these control mechanisms, and subvert the norms perpetuated by traditional fairy tales. In Zipes’ *Fairy Tale and the Art of Subversion*, he examines the qualities a truly subversive fairy tale must have: “to be liberating, [the tale] must reflect *a process of struggle* against all types of suppression and authoritarianism and posit various possibilities for the concrete realization of utopia” (178). This process of struggle, however, does not need to be violent or hostile, as is commonly associated with ‘subversion’. This strug-

gle can take the form of shifts in narrative, especially those that actively challenge patriarchal hierarchy, heterodoxy, and other ‘bourgeois’ norms.

Simply by presenting alternatives to the tales’ normative features, storytellers can shift the paradigms associated with those tales. Fairy tales are inherently political, and so changing a tale is a political act. When a child hears a fairy tale, they learn something about the world; possibly, that a prince always rescues the princess, or that ugly old women are often witches, and so forth. These children absorb aspects of these tales’ messages, and those messages become part of their belief systems about the world. As these children grow into adults, they continue to act in ways that reflect these beliefs. As adults act upon their beliefs, politics form, and our socio-cultural climate reflects the tales from which our beliefs stem. In this way, simply telling a new story is a deeply radical and important act; it can change our beliefs, and so, our actions.

By recognizing the problematic beliefs perpetuated by fairy tales, we can subvert these fundamental messages to create a new set of norms. I recently read a lovely ‘meta-tale’ which illustrates the power we have to recognize problematic patterns, choose to accept or reject them, and change the story ourselves. In “The Story of the Eldest Princess,” by A.S. Byatt, the well-read eldest sister sets out on a dangerous quest. As she walks the road, she reflects on the many stories she has read and soon realizes, “What they all had in common...was a pattern in which the two elder sisters... failed in one way or another, and were turned to stone, or imprisoned in vaults, or cast into magic sleep... She thought, I am in a pattern I know” (187). Once she recognizes this, she decides she’d really rather not be turned into a statue if she can avoid it. She thinks, “I *could* just walk out of this inconvenient story and go my own way. I *could* just leave the Road and look for my own adventures in the Forest” (191). She can, and she does. As she travels through the forest, she encounters many problematic fairy tale themes, and each time re-

jects them. Finally she comes upon an old woman's cottage. The wise woman, who had been expecting her, tells her, "You had the sense to see you were caught in a story, and the sense to see that you could change it into another one...[you] stepped aside and came here, where we collect stories and spin stories and mend what we can and investigate what we can't" (202-3). By joining this wise woman, the eldest princess succeeded in rejecting a story that no longer served her. We can follow her example and spin new tales, tales that mend the holes left by their predecessors. Many contemporary retellings mend these holes by challenging familiar messages and providing radical alternatives.

In the traditional *Beauty and the Beast*, Beauty will not marry the Beast until he transforms into a civilized prince, with whom she can have socially sanctioned, upwardly mobile, wed-locked sex. This is a prime example of societal control within fairy tales. Within a recent retelling, Francesca Lia Block's "Beast," we see a lovely subversion when the Beast transforms into a prince, but Beauty had fallen in love with the Beast:

Yes, the Beast changed. He spoke more now, and did not gaze at Beauty in the same intense, almost pained way... He seemed a bit more clumsy and guarded and distant, too. They no longer ran through the woods together, although they still walked there sometimes... Beauty loved him more than anything, her Beast boy, but, secretly, sometimes, she wished that he would have remained a Beast. (197-8)

This simple idea is quite subversive within the historic fairy tale canon - that a beautiful, privileged young girl should prefer a wild animal to a refined prince goes against classic normative messages designed to reinforce the royal hierarchy (Banes).

In the same vein, Donaghue's retelling, "The Tale of the Rose," recasts the Beast as a masked queen, hiding from unwanted suitors by self-imposed isolation and ugliness. This Beast says to Beauty, "I am not a man" (37), but the girl does not understand. Later, after Beauty has learned that "there was nothing monstrous about this woman... that beauty was infinitely various," do the townspeople stop whispering about a beast in the castle. Instead, they begin to speak of "a beast and a beauty who lived in the castle... others told of two beauties, and others told of two beasts" (Donaghue 39-40). A queen who rejects all male suitors, and a beauty who prefers a queen to a prince, show a remarkable shift toward open gender roles. This queer retelling is one of many contemporary subversions of fairy tales' classic normative messages.

'Queering' is a form of subversion that tilts perspective, shifts expectations, and provides possibility for variation within a traditionally concrete structure. Though the term is specific to queer theory, its application ranges far beyond subversion of heteronormative messages. By its very nature, 'queer' is a slippery term, one many academics hesitate to define. Some, like David Halperin, instead argue, "Queer by definition is *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers...* [Queer] describes a horizon of possibility." The possibility inherent within queer theory is, as Lisa Duggan writes, "the promise of new meanings, new ways of thinking and acting politically" (Sullivan 43). Fairy tales are uniquely positioned to provide these possibilities; to create new messages that do not reflect an ancient ruling class, but queer traditional norms in order to reflect a new generation.

My retelling reflects both these universal patterns and the cultural influences of my past and present, including my reactions to the more traditional norms proposed by classic tales. Fairy tales are instructional, and the norms they are present are, if subconsciously, seen as truths.

If I were to write instructions for a fairy tale (and thus, instructions for life) based on the messages I received as a child, it would read something like this: *Girls, be beautiful, kind, and obedient; if you do, you'll receive your happy ending. If you are made prisoner by a beast, bear this with a patient grace; if you behave sweetly, your true love will emerge. Avoid powerful women, be they stepmother, queen, or witch; they are jealous, evil, and want to devour you. If one puts you in a tower, stay there and wait, or sleep; this is where your prince will find you, if only you're patient. Once he does, all your problems will be solved; once you marry him, you will inherit his castle, his servants, and his happily-ever-after. Whatever you do, don't depart from the path; the woods are dark, dangerous, and filled with the unknown.* The problems inherent in these messages too often go unnoticed, but are acted upon by those who have internalized these beliefs.

These messages have a pattern: girls must wait for the prince and turn away from the witch. Embrace men, even if they do appear as beasts, and stay away from women; whether they're your jealous sisters, ugly stepsisters, stepmothers, seemingly kind old women, or powerful sorceresses, they all are out to get you. This is a problematic message for anyone interested in gender equality, as it demonizes any women who are not young, beautiful, and passive. As both a storyteller and a young woman, I felt a need for a new message – one that re-envision women's roles within the fairy tale canon.

In *Rose*, I presented a new tale, which queered several traditional messages and provided new possibilities. In my story, girls fall in love with each other, the witch acts as a catalyst for each character's self-fulfillment, the princess refuses marriage and becomes the rescuer, and each character finds wholeness in themselves, not in their romantic 'other half'. These messages are radically different from those found in traditional fairy tales, and so are radically subversive. As

these messages take root in a person's psyche, their beliefs may shift; this shift, though subtle, can change the world.

By approaching familiar material with a more critical and creative eye, I attempted to create a tale that reflects my personal convictions and provides a new set of messages, ones better suited to contemporary culture. Many viewers have different interpretations, which is part of my aim - as Stone said, fairy tales' differing layers of meaning are one of their greatest strengths. I was privileged to hear several viewers' interpretations, and relished in the variations. The following narrative will provide a glimpse into my own understanding of the piece, encompassing both my original intentions and influences (the root system), and the queer feminist reading that bloomed in hindsight.

Rose: Prologue

Roses and Cages

Rose opens with a strange vignette: The stage is scattered with rose petals; white on the left, red on the right. Four birdcages hang along the back wall, upstage. Three characters, the Beast, Rose Red, and Rose White, stand motionless between the cages, while another, the Witch, weaves silently across the stage. This image is the heart of the piece, distilled. From the rose petals and cages to the brief interactions between characters, the opening vignette reveals a symbolic glimpse of all to come.

Each character's interaction with the Witch foreshadows the journey they will each



complete, while rose petals and cages combine to form a visual structure for one theme of the piece: Love's capacity to imprison, and the forms of love within captivity.

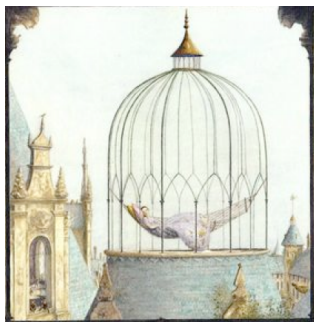
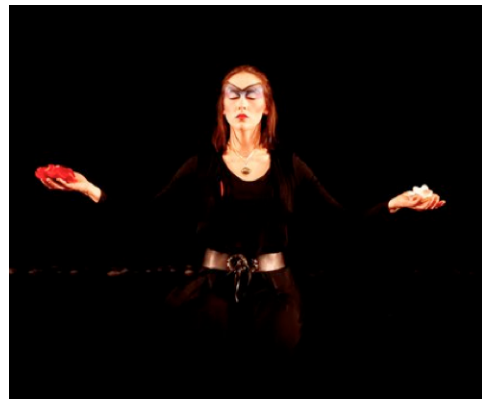
It begins with the rose petals. A theme that threads through many fairy tales, the rose has enormous symbolic potency. A gentle nod to the carnations of Pina Bausch's *Nelken*, the scattered rose petals provide a constant reminder of the *Rose*'s most important symbol. My interest in the rose began as its symbolism of love and marriage, while simultaneously suggesting imprisonment. In several fairy tales within the Western canon, the rose serves as a symbol and physical manifestation of loss of freedom: in *Beauty and the Beast*, Beauty's desire for a rose (and her father's subsequent theft of the rose) led directly to her imprisonment at the Beast's castle. In many tellings of *Sleeping Beauty*, especially the animated Disney movie, high walls of thorny rose bushes surround her, which the prince must slash through to rescue her. In particular, the white rose's symbolism of marriage helped me draw a connection between the rose as a symbol of binding two people together and the rose as a symbol of imprisonment.

In hindsight, the rose also symbolizes feminine sexuality - the flower is quite literally the plant's sex organ, and its many petals aesthetically parallel the vulva. In this light, the white rose's link to marriage includes its association with virginity, or the unopened rose. One historical function of marriage was to 'buy' (through bride-price) a woman's virginity and secure patrilineal order, thereby exerting control and ownership over her sexuality (Kaplan). This furthers the rose's symbolism as both marriage and imprisonment.

The theme of imprisonment extends far beyond its cultural relation to marriage, however, and extends into archetypal integration. During my exploration of archetype it occurred to me that in order to reach the freedom of an integrated psyche, one must delve into and work with the shadow parts of oneself. Take for instance the archetypal Damsel; if Damsels do not recognize

that they believe themselves to be weak and helpless, then their lives will be confined within the parameters of those destructive beliefs. If, on the other hand, a Damsel is able to recognize his/her desire to be rescued, then s/he may develop an ability to be self-empowering and self-protecting. This integration of the light and dark sides of a personal archetype can lead to a great deal of personal freedom, while the ignorance of one's dark sides can be a type of psychic imprisonment. During plot development, we focused on characters' integration and growth beyond these psychic cages by pushing them to face their dark extremes so they could rebound into a more balanced state, at rest between light and dark.

The light and dark aspects of archetypes led me to focus on the duality of characters, from the complementing Roses' (Red and White) extreme temperaments to the pairing of light and dark characters (Beauty with the Beast, for instance). The colored division of the stage represents this; white petals on the left, red petals on the right. The Witch later echoes this image, holding a red rose in her right hand and a white rose in her left. The delicate balance of this duality spurs the plot and, ultimately, allows the characters to find balance within themselves.



Each character in *Rose* begins in an imprisoned state, out of balance between their light and dark sides. The characters never exit the stage, and all action occurs in front of a row of birdcages, one for each character. The cages are a symbolic extension of the rose's imprisoning aspect. The inspiration for the birdcage image came from a version of Beauty and the Beast, illustrated by Angela Barrett, of a young girl inside a birdcage.

The image stuck with me, and developed into a central theme. Like roses, cages can also be read as a vaginal symbol, as Freud pointed out, “female symbols are those that suggest the possibility of either entry or entrapment” (Stone 19). In addition, these cages can represent the function of fairy tales as a societal control mechanism, and suggest the possibility for our escape from archaic confines.

Archetypal Character Development

The four characters onstage in the first vignette are archetypal, drawn from various fairy tales as well as the cast members’ psyches. Like fairy tales, archetypes are both universal and highly personal. As symbols, they are broad enough to encompass the experiences of many different people, and can simultaneously reflect nuances of personality and situation. Like fairy tales, they are applicable across ages, cultures, and personal experiences. In narrative they are often used to create compelling characters. By creating movement characterizations of several archetypes, the performers and I, in collaboration, found ways to recognize facets of ourselves in the characters.

Archetype, as a field of study, has roots far deeper than the scope of this paper could encompass. For my purposes, archetypes are those reoccurring character tropes that surface both within fairy tales and our personal lives. For instance, fairy tales are rife with the Princess archetype, and we are quite familiar with her form: “She is always beautiful, vulnerable, and in need of rescue, specifically by a Knight and, once rescued, she is taken care of in lavish style” (Myss). She also surfaces in our personal lives, as I was reminded upon overhearing a six year-old girl announce, “I wish to be a pretty pink princess, and I’ll live in a castle, and I’ll have all of my husband’s servants” (‘Izzy’, personal communication). These examples are simple reflections of

deeper, more scholarly investigation in the field. To briefly skim the surface of this deep well of knowledge, we can approach archetypes on a more ethereal level:

Think of the collective unconscious as an electromagnetic field. Then you could say that there are certain excited points, points in which the energy of the field is bundled... These points are the archetypes... That force then connects with some traditional wisdom in the unconscious, which begins to give it a direction. (von Franz 40)

These concentrated energetic points in our collective unconscious reflect in the stories we tell, especially stories that arise from a collective voice, as did fairy tales from their origin in oral tradition.

I chose to investigate archetypes that I most immediately related to fairy tales: The Prince, the Beast, the Witch, the Princess, and the Sisters (Rebel and Nurturer). For me, the Witch was the most obvious character, as she plays a role in so many tales (though often under the guise of Wicked Stepmother or Jealous Fairy). I realize now that an equally powerful character choice could have been the Fairy Godmother, but I see the two as being remarkably similar in that they both transform and aid protagonists in their development. The Beast's grotesque melancholy has always interested me, and I saw him as a necessary counterpart to the golden youth of the Prince. The Prince seemed necessary in order that the Princess could have a betrothed (as she does in fairy tales, or at least those of Walt Disney). However, due to circumstance, the performer cast as the Prince was no longer able to rehearse with us; this ended up being quite a lucky turn of events, as I found that the fairy tale I wanted to tell had no need for a prince. The last two characters, the Sisters, came out of a repeated trope of fairy tale sisters: the ugly stepsisters, the jealous elder sisters, the beautiful younger sister, and the complementary sis-

ter, or foil. Due to logistical and narrative reasons, the cast shrank to four, and the characters consolidated to: Witch, Beast, Rose White, Rose Red (performed by Sarah Bowers, Sean Owens, Skye Hughes, and both Patrycja Humienik and Mollie Wolf, respectively). The Beast took on characteristics of the Prince, while the Princess evolved into Rose White, and the Rebel and Nurturer combined to form a Wild Woman, Rose Red. Each character grew to reflect archetypal themes cultivated over centuries of storytelling.

In rehearsals, we worked extensively with character development for each archetype, using Myss' "Gallery of Archetypes" as an inspirational resource. Each character required a good deal of improvisational exploration, which we explored individually as well as in relation to the other characters. We investigated broadly at first, and gradually narrowed our focus to those elements of each archetype that resonated with both the particular performer and myself. For instance, the woman who played Rose White found that the aspects of the Princess/Damsel archetype that resonated with her included vanity and a reliance on beauty, rather than, say, my inner Damsel's desire to be rescued. Likewise, elements that were particularly difficult for performers to integrate were explored carefully, as with the woman who played the Witch; she found that the elements of loneliness associated with the Witch/Hermit archetype were 'too close to home' to investigate early in the process. In that instance, we put that aspect on hold, but later came to the decision that the character's depth required the performer's personal resonance, and so reintegrated themes of loneliness and desire (Myss). These 'minings of the psyche' became our most rich source of information as we developed the character archetypes.

As a director, working with such sensitive material was a challenge, as sometimes the performers were not ready or willing to engage with their own psyches. In most cases, gentle facilitation and open-ended questioning led to the performer's authentic embodiment of these

themes. In one case, however, a performer told me, “I will do whatever you tell me to, but I won’t connect with that personally. I can’t” (S. Bowers, personal communication). As we were working with some deeply dark material, these needs were respected. Rather than asking the performer to generate movement, I simply mined my own psyche for the material and set it on the dancer’s body. In general, the characters were collaboratively formed through my personal input and choreographic impulses, alongside the performers’ gut-level impulses associated with their archetypes.

Once characters had sufficiently developed as individuals, we worked with a series of improvisational duets between each pair of characters. Those duets that resonated the most, that showed some potent connection, became pivotal events for character development. Each of these duets revolves around various forms of desire and control, as the characters’ intersecting dynamics revealed. These relational dynamics were highly informative during plot development, and revealed ways that each archetype could complement and contrast with another.

The Characters

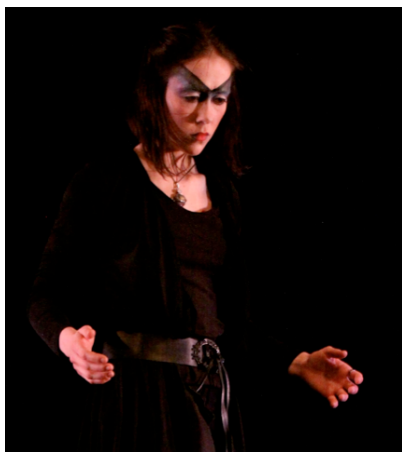
The Witch

The Witch is nearly universal in fairy tales, whether as Powerful Sorceress, Jealous Fairy, Wicked Stepmother, or other incarnations. In his poem, “Instructions,” Neil Gaiman writes a roadmap for all fairy tales, drawing upon many stories. His description of the Witch formed the basis of some of our early improvisations: “Take nothing... Beneath a twisted oak sits an old woman. She may ask for something; give it to her. She will point the way to the castle” (*Broth-*

ers and Beasts 62). As we worked from this starting point, the Witch became an interesting exercise in understanding balance and transformation.

For each archetype, there are light and dark sides. Most representations of the Witch are very one-sided: She is the Wicked Witch, with evil intentions and an appetite for children. This stems from “the patriarchalization of matrilineal tales, which... led to the replacement of female protagonists and rituals celebrating the moon goddess by heroes and rites emphasizing male superiority and sun worship” (*Brothers Grimm* 194-5). Beyond this replacement, the new tales villainized strong female characters, casting them as the “nagging wife, abusive mother-in-law, and wicked-witch stepmother” (Gilmore 7). I sought to re-envision the Witch as more balanced, so that rather than being evil, she is simply amoral, beyond the constructions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

Much like a force of nature, she destroys to create, out of necessity rather than malice -



much in the same way a wildfire ravages a landscape, but simultaneously clears the dead material and allows new growth to follow. In my own musings, it came to me that the Witch is much like facing our fears so that we may grow, as she is “scary and deep and very necessary” (A. Mayer). Stone put it well in her book, *Some Day Your Witch Will Come*, with the explanation, “The Crone, after all, is not a fairy godmother but

an aggressive and quite uncompromising challenger. She wants to get to the heart of things and, if necessary, to bring about transformations that might not be to your liking. And she will not go away once she has been called up” (2). This aspect makes her a crucial catalyst for the integration of the other archetypes’ dualities. In the way that fire’s destruction leads to new growth, the

seemingly malicious trials that the Witch forces the characters to endure lead directly to their renewal as balanced beings.

The Witch's role as catalyst led us to incorporate shape-shifting into her movement vocabulary. This ability to shift shapes stems from characters such as Snow White's wicked step-mother disguised as an old woman, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*'s beautiful sorceress disguised as a hag, as well as folkloric themes of witches' shape-shifting abilities. By shifting from old woman to young sorceress, the Witch is able to take the form of each character's catalyst, as their growth requires.

In addition, the Witch absorbed aspects of the Narrator, a character whom I briefly played in early explorations. The Narrator evokes the long history of women's folk tale, as they often told stories while they spun thread and wove cloth. The phrases 'to spin a tale' and 'to weave a plot' come directly from these spinsters' story circles (Banes 47-8). By incorporating a theme of thread-pulling into the Witch's movement vocabulary, I echoed the motions of fairy tales' foremothers.

By shifting the one-sided representation of the Witch to a more balanced view of Witch as creator/destroyer and spinner of tales, I attempted to restore the wise matriarch figure lost in patriarchal translation and evoke the matrilineal nature of oral tradition.

The Beast

The Beast is a very well known and oft-repeated character. Most often, he is simply the Beast, as in the many retellings of the Beauty and the Beast tale. Less commonly, he is the Bear, as in the tale of Snow White and Rose Red. In this tale, like the Beast, the Bear is a prince enchanted to appear as a wild animal. Like Beauty, Snow White falls in love with the Bear and

marries him once she discovers he is a prince. The trope of marriage became a deep source of information for this process, especially as reflected in the sanitized Grimm tales. Simply, the Beast/Bear character provides a foil for the Prince that fairy tale heroines are supposed to want. Beasts are wild, hairy, and represent a certain darkness. Young women, especially those who wish to remain ‘white’ and pure, cannot marry Beasts... unless they are truly Princes inside. This reflects the heterodoxy that classic fairy tales attempt to perpetuate, alongside other social norms meant to maintain ‘good’ behavior. The Beast, a supposedly ‘dark’ character, often acts as an antagonist against whom hero/ines test their strength of heart, purity, and courage (and conformance to societal norms).

For us, the character of the Beast became an exploration of the Shadow Lover archetype, with an obsessive, predatory nature, as well as an exploration of the deep self-loathing that is found in many representations of the Beast character. A fundamental melancholy pervaded the performer’s interpretation, working off the Beast’s grotesque appearance as well as illustrative quotes such as, “How very frightening he is... and yet his eyes are so sad” (M. Mayer 20).

While musing upon this character, I came to understand that his disgust stems from the belief “that your desired & loved will not see the light in you. The disgust of knowing your light is dimmed, hidden by your own hand” (A. Mayer). His self-loathing at his own grotesque form (and actions) distilled into a repeated gesture, in which he attempts to wipe away an invisible smudge on his cheek. His character also absorbed aspects of the Prince, such as arrogant chivalry, which was an important counter-balance to the Princess aspects within Rose White.

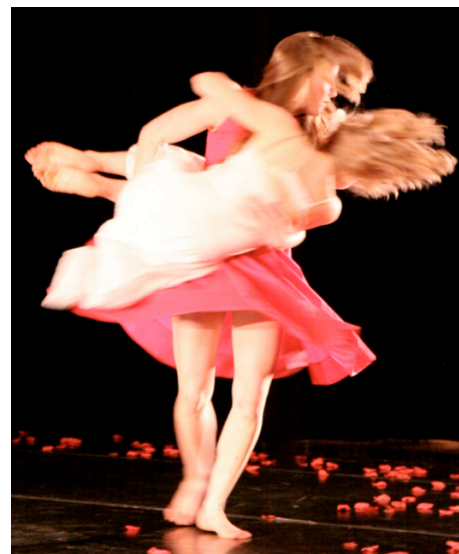


As the only male onstage in a queer feminist fairy tale, the Beast plays a very delicate role. His actions throughout the piece reflect both the careless arrogance associated with contemporary male oppression - the blind privilege that marks an ignorant ruling class - and the melancholy confusion of a kind-hearted man mired within a patriarchal culture.

The Roses - Sisters/Lovers/Alter-Egos

Rose White and Rose Red are inspired directly from the tale Snow White and Rose Red, by the Brothers Grimm. My understanding of them comes less from the original Grimm tale as from a modern reinterpretation, “Rose,” by Francesca Lia Block, a short story within *Rose and the Beast*. In her tale, the sisters are complements, yin and yang, as illustrated in such quotes as, “Rose White is smaller and thinner... Rose Red is faster and stronger... Rose White is quiet and Rose Red talks fast... [her] voice evokes volcanoes, salt spray... Rose White listens and smiles... Rose Red gives Rose White courage and Rose White gives Rose Red peace” (133-5).

Alongside these complementary natures, however, comes a certain co-dependence: “We will never need anyone else ever, we are going to do everything together... We are complete” (133). Their complementary nature led to an exploration of dependency, and the imbalances within each Rose’s extreme. Within this, they can also be seen (as many viewers did) as the ultimate co-dependent lesbian lovers. The mirror bias typical of same-sex partnerships visually presents in the Roses’ parallel costuming and choreography, and the deeply entwined nature of their relationship easily leads to this interpretation (Fraley).



This reading is quite close to my own understanding of Roses Red and White, and has been for years, as evident in an excerpt of my creative writing from over five years ago:

Rose Red to sweep across the stage, a frenzied windstorm with wild hair, White Rose to catch Red up in her arms and temper her momentum, a sighing whirl of petals.... In the old story, Rose Red was too wild, too much fire. Rose White was too scared, shrinking. They held each other, calming and comforting, two hearts bleeding into one another. Rose Red and Rose White, two puzzle pieces. Connection - inevitable. (A. Mayer)

Ultimately, these two characters (whether sisters, lovers, alter-egos, or all three) learn to find balance within themselves, rather than in the temperance of each other's excesses.

Rose White

As we developed Rose White, we found that the Princess and Damsel archetypes resonated well with Francesca Lia Block's description of White's timidity, dependence, and fearful nature: "...too quiet, too cold, too deep within herself, afraid to speak, afraid to be seen..."

(136). Her greatest challenge is to learn to be alone, with a solid sense of self. This reflects the



classic feminine stereotype in fairy tales, of the 'good girl' waiting, hoping for her true love to come and rescue her: Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Rapunzel spring most readily to mind. Gaiman's "Instructions" gave us additional insight into White, as he cautions, "Remember your name" (*Brothers and Beasts* 63). The loss of a name is a metaphor for loss of power and identity, as seen

in many fairy tales; in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice loses her name and her

willpower in a deep forest, and in Rumpelstiltskin, the nameless heroine can only regain power from her dwarfish antagonist by learning and using his name.

For White, we focused extensively on the loss of agency and the rediscovery of self, especially through revision of the classic helpless damsel; in this fairy tale, not only does she refuse the Prince/Beast's marriage proposals, but she also transforms from helpless damsel to the rescuer. During the creation process, I 'spoke' rather firmly with the Rose White archetype, informing her, "Sorry little miss, but *you're* the hero in this tale, and you'll be the one fighting dragons, overcoming demons, and rescuing the princess" (A. Mayer). This transformation is a key revision to the patriarchal (de-)evolution that changed the "Cinderella type heroine... from a young active woman who is expected to pursue her own destiny...into a helpless, inactive pubescent girl, whose major accomplishments are domestic, and who must obediently wait to be rescued by a male" (*Brothers Grimm* 194-5). By removing the necessity of a Prince Valiant and recasting Rose White as the rescuer, I queered the tale and restored a level of empowerment to a feminine archetype whose agency had been systematically stripped and replaced by fear.

Rose Red

Rose Red is quite a different character than White, as she possesses a very strong sense of self. In contrast to White, her identity is so strong that she can tend towards reckless selfishness. For Red, we worked with aspects of the Nurturer as well as the Wanderer/Rebel, which reflected the yearning for adventure and fierce strength shown in Block's character: "she is always coming up with ideas -- they will go ride the



rapids, climb down to the bottom of the canyons, travel to far-off lands where babies wear nothing but flowers and their feet can never touch the floor” (134). Red’s independence and thirst for adventure is uncontainable, even by White’s dependence upon her. In a journal exploration of *Rose Red*, I explained:

In Red is a thirst, an urgency to... see and to do and to become breathless at the wonder of it all. But then what of those who love her? What will happen when their foundation flies off into the sunset, curls raging?... There’s some amount of reckless self-centeredness that would take her away, just as there’s a certain obligatory self-sacrifice that would keep her there... And a knowing that White will be fine. Or a decision that her own freedom is more important. (A. Mayer)

Red’s wanderlust and need for freedom (despite White’s neediness) became a strong theme, as it echoed the rose’s paradox between love and imprisonment. Her curiosity leads her to the Witch, who also attempts to possess her. However, “A rose that’s cut can only die,” and the free-spirited Red proves uncontainable (Brett 10). Due to this, our main choreographic focus when developing Red was a sense of rising tension and release, as if struggling against invisible bonds, as well as the range of movement between free and bound flow (Dell).

Red’s character is less familiar than White’s within the fairy tale canon, though themes of wandering, freedom, and desire are present in many tales - especially in contemporary revisions. Red came to reflect the Wild Woman archetype, which is characterized by a fiercely passionate, visionary spirit (Estés). Within *Rose*, Red’s role is as a foil to the shrinking nature of White’s ‘good girl’ persona. Developing her character allowed me to queer the tale by providing a too-often unseen example of a bold, sexual woman whose curiosity and desire cannot be contained by social norms or expectations.

Rose: The Tale

After the opening vignette, the lights fade, and the unbroken narrative begins. Choreographically, each scene overlaps another in parallel arcs. The action onstage is intentionally dense as each character fully experiences the unfolding narrative arc. This choreographic choice forces the audience to choose which characters they will focus on at any given time throughout the performance. In this way, the shifts in a viewer's attention can create a unique experience and interpretation of the piece, different from another viewer's understanding. This approach appealed to me because archetypes are highly personal, and must be interpreted differently by each person to be applicable to their experience. For clarity, I will divide the narrative into rough scenes and discuss each separately, explaining my inspirations and delving into further analysis. If one has not already seen *Rose* onstage, understanding of this analysis will be greatly enhanced by a digital viewing of the piece, and may also lead to valuable personal interpretation.

Shifting Balance & Beast's Transformation

The lights rise on a new scene: Roses Red and White are intertwined in a sort of yin-yang, harmoniously balanced, curled into each other. The Witch holds a rose in each hand, red and white balanced as if she were a pair of scales. This balance point quickly shifts, as Red and White move towards their own extremes: Red leads, explores, surges forward – White follows, shrinks, and leans on her sister. Throughout the piece, these extremes grow even more polarized and lead to the Roses' separation. The more White tries to hold on, the more smothered Red feels, until she must break free of White's dependence.

At the beginning of the piece, the Beast is still a strapping young man, with the arrogance of our Shadow Prince. A romantic, infatuated with beauty, he absently plucks rose petals: *she*



loves me, she loves me not... The Beast passes by the Witch, who is hunched over in her crone form, and he carelessly tosses a handful of plucked petals onto her. Unluckily for the Beast, this draws her attention and she rises, offering him a single rose. The Beast brusquely rejects her offer and turns away, reflecting two key facets of the Beast's character: his romantic cravings and his preoccupation with appearance. Both these

aspects have, as he soon learns, their shadow sides. Only a seemingly undesirable woman could reveal the Beast's vain pride, and once it is revealed the Witch shape shifts into a beautiful young woman, who corrects his arrogant privilege by transforming him into a beast. Through this transformation, she makes apparent the shadow sides of his character: a grotesque form to reflect the ugliness she saw within, and a fitting punishment for his obsession with youthful beauty.

When I choreographed the Beast's petal-plucking opening gesture, I simply intended to illustrate the conflict inherent in this act; through his romantic desire he simultaneously mutilates a rose, and by extension, foreshadows his treatment of Rose White. The carelessness in this act (and his accompanying arrogance) is followed by retribution by the Witch. In hindsight,



the choreographic choice parallels the too-common 'plucking' of virginity and careless treatment of women that our culture seems to glorify. When he tosses the petals onto the Witch and rejects

her rose, it highlights our cultural emphasis on youth, showing that older women are too often disrespected as ‘unattractive’ by our society’s youth-centric standards. His actions lead the Witch to lower the Beast to the hierarchal status at which women are often viewed, equalizing the gendered power dynamics. The dynamics were not the Beast’s choosing, however, but a by-product of a patriarchal culture. The interactions between him and the Witch, and his later relationship with Rose White, reflect the struggle many modern men encounter due to mixed messages around romance and relationships.

There are many instances of these cultural inconsistencies, including the following excerpts from the popular website, *AskMen* (whose tagline is “Be a Better Man”). In the article “10 Ways to Get the Women You Want,” the author advises:

Pretend she’s not even there....If she says anything to you...answer it in a disinterested voice and don't look at her... [later,] look her in the eyes and say, ‘So is it true what they say about redheads (or blondes, or brunettes)?’ ... and give her a sly smile, as if you know something that she doesn't. (DeAngelo)

Speaking only for myself (as a woman who prefers sensitive, kind men), this approach would succeed only in branding the offender as ‘rude’ or ‘obnoxious’, if not other, less polite terms. The rest of the article offers somewhat better advice than feigned disinterest and sleazy condescension, including, “focus on deepening your integrity and your understanding of women...” but how are men to effectively sort through such conflicting messages?

These examples are mild, especially in comparison to messages that lead to rape and domestic abuse, but are illustrative of the often backwards but widely-consumed advice (explicit or otherwise) that men constantly receive. Even men who consider themselves feminists are not immune to pervasive cultural misogyny. Gilmore explains, “I consider myself a tolerant and en-

lightened man, and I harbor a sincere fondness for women... However, I do recognize occasional negative stirrings in myself... impatience, peevishness, a tendency to scapegoat females...” (xi). The Beast is no exception to these cultural influences, which he must move beyond in order to regain his human form.

Rose Red and the Witch’s Tango

Rose Red is the first sister to venture out alone. She runs to the edge of the stage closest to the audience, the fourth wall, and peers over it as if it were a cliff edge. Exhilarated, she races through the space, stopping only at the edges of her container. She leaves White behind, alone in her uncertainty and dependence. Red is soon seduced by the exoticism of the Witch and, ever-curious, she plucks the red rose from the Witch’s palm, tipping the balance between red and white. By taking the red rose, the rose of passion and lust, she initiates; in response, the Witch drops the remaining white rose at Rose White’s feet as if to say, *here little girl, keep your purity - your lover and I are about to see what real women do*. The Witch, the shape-shifter, becomes what Red desires: a wild ferocity, exoticism, adventure and novelty. Red’s desire (red roses’ most common meaning) overwhelms her. In rehearsals, we worked with vocalization, “I want... I want... I want...” until her craving became palpable.



The following tango between Red and the Witch is unabashedly sexual, as tangos tend to be, complete with the Witch’s smelling of Red’s body, hair-pulling, and a semi-violent intensity between the two. The tango was designed to show mutual desire and seduction, but with a dangerous tint. The Witch is flawed by her great power - not only does it breed loneliness, but ma-

nipulation. Her desire for Red is to possess, manifest through repeated hair-pulling, which expresses both painful lust and a need for control. This characteristically possessive and



domineering side of the Witch culminates in Red's capture within a birdcage. As the cage is a vaginal symbol, this caging could easily be viewed as a sexual metaphor. Here, the Witch sews invisible threads into both Red's heart and her own, binding them together – a cloying and dangerous sort of bonding.

Soon, the Witch begins to bleed red rose petals from her own heart. Unluckily for her, a rose that's cut can only die, and the spark she so admires in Red soon wilts in captivity (Brett).

The desire between Rose Red and the Witch, a reckless, lustful type of wanting, was inspired by Emma Donaghue's *Kissing the Witch*. In this collection of short stories, Donaghue reinvents classic fairy tales through feminist and, often, queer lenses. In one story, "The Tale of the Kiss," a witch lives alone in a cave, isolated from the villagers by her power: "Not that they ever looked at me properly; they seemed to think my eyes would scald them... Nothing touched me in the night except the occasional spider. I was complete" (211-5). One day, a redheaded girl comes to her, but unlike the others she is unafraid. In return for a debt the witch asks for a kiss, which the girl gives easily, with a laugh, "Is that all? Why are they all so afraid of you, when your price is so easy to pay" (225)? For the girl, it was an easy price, but the witch falls madly in love with this bold girl, saying, "All at once I knew I needed that girl... I would give her my heart in a bag and let her do with it what she pleased. I would say the word love" (227). This relationship intrigued me, so I extended it into the narrative to create a queer reading of Red and the Witch's relationship.

Rose White and the Beast's Pas de Deux

Once Rose Red leaves Rose White alone, White descends into weakness and fragility (Fig. 5). Her sense of self, dependent on Red's strength, crumples as she stares at herself in the 'mirror' of the fourth wall, her sadness and loneliness palpable. The Beast, staring at his own grotesque reflection, sees her from across the stage and begins a predatory, yet loving stare. Like Red and the Witch, the Beast desires, but for beauty. His desire is obsessive, longing, as he consumes and vomits up a white rose. When she transformed him, the Witch left him a mysterious necklace - a part of him knows its power, but a larger part pretends not to know. He approaches White from behind, hesitant, but her neck is bared in helplessness. He collars her, though tenderly, and she falls unconscious.

The Beast crouches over White's unconscious form, hesitant, then drags her limp body center stage. He lifts her to her feet and, eyes closed, she takes his hand. Her eyes are closed the whole time, giving it a feeling of unaware non-consentuality. As she stumbles blindly through their romantic pas de deux, he proposes to her again and again, like the Beasts in old tales who ask Beauty every night, "Can you love me?" "Will you marry me?" and "What if I let you go? Would you stay of your own free will?" (Lang, Mayer, Brett, Donaghue 36). Each time, she refuses, incapable of consent. Each time, the Beast bends on one knee, hand extended, proposing to Rose White in an effort to gain her 'white rose', or her virginity (and by extension, her love). Each time, she turns away, letting the white petals he offers fall to the floor. At one point, in his embrace, she reaches out towards Rose Red, who is prone on the floor next to



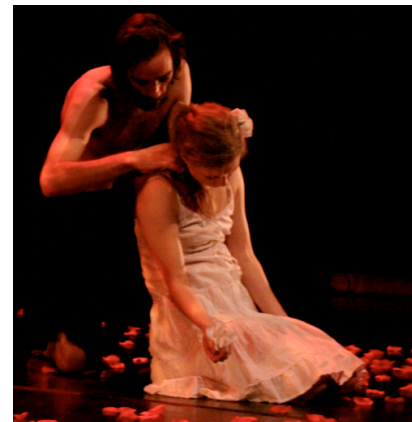


the Witch; then White herself crumples to the floor. It is clear with whom her heart lies. Though the Beast has hold over Rose White via the enchanted necklace, he does not have her heart. She reaches for him like a child, tenderly, needily, but not lovingly. The Beast finally realizes his error and apologetically removes the necklace, bringing White back to full conscious-

ness and revealing to her his beastly form.

Like the Beauties of tale, Rose White is the Beast's prisoner, though he only shows her tenderness. Unlike the Beauties of tale, Rose White does not fall in love with the Beast. Instead of running into his arms, she seems disgusted and angry, doubling over at the waist and backing away from him. The Beast, too, turns away, and descends into the harsh truth; she did not stay of her own free will.

The necklace, a choker, is a very powerful symbol within *Rose*, and is a rich source of analysis. In addition to its function of cutting off her voice, furthering Rose White's struggle for self-agency, the necklace acts as an imprisoning force. Early in our explorations of Rose White, we found great resonance in image of a young woman allowing a man to put a necklace around her bared neck. The vulnerability and accompanying sense of ownership became potent launching points for our improvisational scores. The sealing of a necklace (or collar) around another's neck is an intensely possessive gesture of ownership, in parallel with the way a dog owner collars their pet. This also parallels the form of the wedding



ring; a circular metal band of ownership that, in addition to symbolizing never-ending love, historically sealed a woman to her husband. Before World War II, the vast majority of wedding ceremonies only included a ring for the bride, a dynamic that echoes the medieval ‘purchasing’ of a woman through bride-price (Howard, Kaplan).

The ownership of women goes far beyond symbolic jewelry, however. In many tales of a sleeping princess, such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White*, the original versions are much less ‘family-friendly’ than those presented by Walt Disney. Originally, rather than a sweet, chaste kiss, princes woke sleeping virgins through intercourse (Barchilon). In Giambattista Basile’s *Pentamerone*, a predecessor to *Sleeping Beauty*, “[the king] called to her, but she did not awake... Her beauty, however, set him afire, and he carried her in his arms to a bed, where he gathered the fruits of life and then left her asleep in the bed” (*Brothers Grimm* 212-3). This is a rather grotesque image, as one asleep cannot give consent, and so the origins of many young girls’ fairy tale fantasies are rooted in a form of rape. This nonconsensual dynamic inspired the duet between Rose White and the Beast, as he attempts to romance her through her haze of semi-consciousness.

The duet is in the ballet form of *pas de deux*, historically used between lovers (especially of the heterosexual royal variety), which would typically culminate in marriage. The hierarchal and heteronormative form is queered by the shifts in White and the Beast’s duet; unlike fairy tale heroines who yearn for a prince’s proposal, White is barely conscious of his presence. This echoes other *pas de deux* such as George Balanchine’s *La Sonnambula*, in



which the ballerina seems “oblivious to her partner,” and dances “as if lost in a dream from which she would never wake” (Anderson). The connection between these duets furthered as in *La Sonnambula*, the romantic poet, like the Beast, “falls in love with her, and he tries to dance with her, he tries to get her to wake up, he tries to get her attention focused on him.” Beyond this, both duets idealize the sleeping women as objects of beauty: “Balanchine was always dramatizing onstage his sense that men had an ideal longing for an ideal love object... in the form of the sleepwalker” (Rogoff). This links back to the Sleeping Beauty trope, to the desire for a beautiful and complacent woman.

The parallels between this duet and a rape situation bear further discussion. For some, the duet was fairly triggering in this area; the woman who performed Rose White relayed to me that her mother had had a particularly difficult time viewing the duet, as she “hated watching him do those things to [her daughter]” (S. Hughes, personal communication). The non-consensual nature of the duet was my intention, though a rape scenario goes beyond my understanding of the pair’s dynamics. In my interpretation, the Beast is a gentle man (if confused and somewhat obsessed), and so the overall tone is one of eerie tenderness, not violence. His actions are not designed to villainize men as oppressors, but to highlight one longing for connection, and the conflicting nature of desire and conscience.



Like modern men who report confusion around conflicting advice, the Beast’s less-than-noble attempts for White’s heart are not entirely his fault, but also stem from the deeply confusing cultural messages men receive regarding the treatment of women (A. Ferguson, personal communication). In rehearsal, upon questioning the Beast’s motivations, we found that his ac-

tions (however dubious) stemmed from the profound desire for connection, tenderness, love; the form in which this connection came (White's hazy neediness) was less important than the fact that it came at all.

Bound & Released

As the Beast realizes that he cannot truly have White, at least not while she is his prisoner, so realizes the Witch of Red. Throughout the pas de deux, the caged Rose Red has wilted to the ground, having lost her will. The Witch begins to bleed red rose petals from her chest as she continues to sew her heart to Red's, and sees that she has betrayed them both; in her desire to possess, she has quashed Red's spirit and left her own heart gaping in loneliness: "On the whole I am inclined to think that a witch should not kiss. Perhaps it is the not being kissed that makes her a witch; perhaps the source of her power is the breath of loneliness around her" (Donaghue 226). Faced with this vulnerability, she attempts again to regain control; her power stems from the control she has over her world. The Witch methodically begins to measure lengths of red



rope. The sexual bondage undertones here are clear, as straight from her (vaginal) caging of Red, the Witch ties her up with rope that is the color of passionate desire. She leads the disheveled and distraught Red to the edge of the stage, where she mutters unintelligible words into the younger woman's ear. As the internal tension builds we hear Red's breath, shuddering, and at the moment of climax, she gasps. This, the climax of the piece, can easily be read as Rose Red's first orgasm. Her internal tension, the spirit within her

raging to break free of self-imposed restrictions (namely, her familial responsibility to Rose White), reaches a breaking point. She releases into a whirlwind of movement, a disorienting flurry of pent-up energy (Jones).

Like Red and the Witch, Rose White has also lost control of herself, seduced by the Beast's enchanted necklace. She reels, struggling against her own helplessness and fragility, and performs a short solo in bound flow, as described in Rudolf Laban's analysis of movement quality (Dell). One hand alternately covers her mouth and holds her own wrist, as if she is struggling against the bonds of her own body, unable to break free of the limitations both she and society place upon her. Simultaneously, the Beast wraps himself in the very rope that once held Rose Red, confined by both his melancholy self-loathing and the restrictive gender norms that prescribe 'manly' behavior.



Rose White's internal tension escalates from bound flow to an accumulative gesture phrase based on a silent monologue: *I can't, I can't, I can't...* White circles helplessly around the stage in opposing rotation with the Witch. Rivals, the Witch still holds more power, as she



fences Red in with ever-smaller circles of petals, while White shakes her head and hugs herself. As Red's confinement reaches a mere few feet diameter, the Beast proposes to White one last time, bringing forth her breaking point. In her final refusal of marriage, White transforms from the helpless damsel to the rescuing 'prince'; self-assured

and able to save both herself and her love, Rose Red. She rushes to Red and holds the struggling girl tightly in her arms, becoming a source of nurturing strength, and cradles her as the frenzy subsides.

This section, the catharsis, is inspired by various forms of bondage: external, internal, self-imposed, and from the ‘other’. These constrictions build tension in each of the performers until they each find a release, whether by another or from within. In this way I sought to manifest the integration of each archetypes’ light and dark, as characters struggle against their psychic confines in order to reach greater wholeness. Through this struggle, each character is able to rebound from their outermost extremes and find rest in a state of balance.



Balance Restored

As the Witch and Beast watch, Roses Red and White find a new balance within themselves. The two reunite, though events have left them changed; they no longer curl into each other, but pull away. They reprise the earlier yin-yang duet, though what began as a harmonious lean into one another becomes an exploration of opposing pulls and counterweight. Each sister attempts to lead the other away, but they head in opposite directions. The opposing pull lets them balance, but they cannot move apart while each holds the other. Finally, the sisters realize this, recognize their need to part ways, and sweetly exchange roses, as if to say, “you’ll always have



a part of me.” Rose Red now wears a white rose in her hair, while Rose White wears the red rose, finally balanced as individuals. Red is finally able to temper her reckless and wandering spirit with White’s introspection, while White’s timidity becomes infused with Red’s strength. Both are able to leave the other, but with joyful freedom and quiet strength, respectively. They part, and each exit the stage with a new integrity and wholeness in themselves.

Both the Beast and Witch release the objects of their desire quietly, as the ties that bound them to the Roses dissipate. The Beast lets go of White as she rejects him in full awareness, while the Witch lets go of Red as she sees that White is better able to love Red than she. There is also a certain knowing in the way that the Witch lets go, as she is the seer; she sees a balance restored, both despite of and because of her manipulations, and in this balance she finds satisfaction.

The Roses find balance within themselves, not in each other. This may be one of the most-needed messages in contemporary fairy tale. The ‘fairy tale ending’ of finding one’s true



love and riding off into the sunset has, for many, resulted in a somewhat destructive mentality.

Waiting to find your perfect ‘other half’ to be whole leads to disappointed expectations and needy lovers. There is a need for new fairy tales, ones that are functionally instructional in the

realm of relationships. The non-functional messages that Disney tales, in particular, provide have lead to a large amount of confusion around love relationships. This is culturally evident in the somewhat comical Facebook group(s), “Disney Gave me Unrealistic Expectations about Love/Relationships/Women/Men,” which have a combined total of over 149,000 members. This

is further reflected in books such as How to be an Adult in Relationships, which give the unfortunately uncommon advice, “Mature adults...seek only about 25 percent...of their need fulfillment from someone else” (Richo 70-1). This is a far cry from the someday-my-prince-will-come yearning of Disney’s Cinderella, and a much needed reality check. *Rose* presents the radical alternative of finding wholeness within one’s self, not within a dependent relationship, and posits this integration of self as a new type of happy ending.

Gift of a Rose

The objects of their former desire gone, the Beast and Witch are left alone together once more. The Beast, hunched over, gathers red rose petals, and upon presenting them to the Witch they ‘transform’ into a red rose. She accepts the rose, and he kisses her on the cheek. He turns from her, and as he walks offstage he transforms into a straight-backed and humble man, better for his encounter with his darkness.

The Witch is left alone with a lingering kiss and a single rose. In the end, she is alone, as she always has been. She has brushed up against love, cultivated the darkness, and restored balance in each of the other characters: White’s fear turned to strength, Red’s restlessness to freedom, and the Beast’s arrogance to humility. She cradles the red rose, then approaches the audience, silent, menacing, beautiful. She offers it out to the audience, as she did to the Beast, Rose Red, and to White. The lights fade on her open-ended offer, question, promise - a single rose for the taking, if one so chooses.



Further analysis reveals the Beast's psychological transformation, in addition to his physical change. In stark contrast to the arrogant, ignorantly chauvinistic man who refused the Witch's red rose, the Beast humbly offers her the same rose, as if to say, "I see now this is beautiful, and I see the beauty in all women." By physically lowering himself below this powerful female figure, he acknowledges the existing power imbalance between genders and offers to rectify it. . By kissing her, he seems to recognize the beauty in all women, even women who, like the Witch, can sometimes seem ugly (in her old woman form) or 'bitchy' (in her young woman form). This acknowledgment, humility, and compassion save him, and he transforms back to human form. In this way, he releases himself: he gives the Witch respect and affection, then becomes his own salvation when the Witch sees that his heart finally reflects his humanity (Fig. 12).

Likewise, the Witch's final offer of a rose has multiple unique interpretations. From my archetypal and feminist standpoints, I see her offer in several ways: "Will you go on this journey?" "Can you embrace your darkness?" and "Do you see beauty in the woman, the rose?" However, viewers' psyches must fill in the blank for themselves, and decide whether they want to accept the Witch's proposal – whatever it may be.



...Ever After: Conclusion

My original intent for *Rose* was simply to “tell a beautiful story... [one] so simply poignant that it will touch those watching with their resonance” (A. Mayer). I knew the fairy tale’s power of adaptability, and wanted to harness it; I wanted to create a fairy tale in which viewers could see themselves, in which multiple reflections could arise. In the end I succeeded, at least for one person - myself.

Through work in archetypal characters and fairy tale tropes, I mined into the collective memory of thousands of years of fairy tale tellings. By working with such universally applicable symbols, I created a story that unwittingly reflected the storyteller. In hindsight, I must have known, but often the story does not reveal itself to the teller until it has been told. Once told, however, stories have a persistent way of presenting and re-presenting themselves until one understands their deeper meanings.

Rose presented itself to me as a beautiful, strange story, but re-presented itself as a radical statement. Bred of my cultural standing as a young, educated, liberal, and queer woman, *Rose* became a reflection of my disappointments and frustrations with the patriarchal, heteronormative tales that I came to both cherish and resent. In my experience, sometimes girls fall in love with other girls, and not the handsome prince. In my experience, women hold vast power - power that can be subtle and deep. In my experience, the only one who can truly save you is yourself. From my experience, a new story presented itself, one that was both very different from and strikingly similar to the fairy tales I knew from childhood.

By creating a new story, one that reflects my personal truths, I took part in an important lineage of storytellers. Storytellers hold a remarkably subtle power; their tales are entertaining, so seem innocuous, but they lay root in our minds and create our mental framework. At times,

though, these frameworks outlive their usefulness. The instructions I received from childhood fairy tales needed revision; luckily, fairy tales thrive on innovation. By presenting a new story, I presented a new set of possibilities, a new set of options. Imagine a generation of children who, each night, hear tales of outspoken princesses and gentle knights. I can only hope to see the adults those children may grow to become. Stories hold power; it is up to the storytellers to use that power well.

Rose reflects twenty-two years of stories, both fairy tales and those unwritten, that laid root in my mind. As Zipes said, “When a fairy tale ‘works’, it works its way into our blood-stream,” becoming a part of us - but as the tales became a part of me, they changed as I changed. As humankind grows across the centuries, so do the fairy tales. We tell our own story when we tell a fairy tale, and as we change, so do our stories. Likewise, when we see a need for change, we must change our stories; by doing so, we can change ourselves.

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